

Sous la direction d'Antoine Gauthier



LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN AU PATRIMOINE IMMATÉRIEL



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SAFEGUARDING AND CELEBRATING ICH IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR



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Not in my time and not in your time, but in a time that was perhaps not so long ago, when the oceans were so full of fish that you could walk from one side of the harbour all the way around to the other side on a wooden flakes—the platforms for drying fish—without once ever having to set foot on dry land.

There was, in the community of Ferryland, on Newfoundland's southern shore, a young man by the name of Curran. He soon attracted the attention of a young lady and it was decided that the two of them should be married.

They decided that they would move a little bit further along the shore to the community of Renews; that where her family was from. They bought a little piece of meadow property and they built a little wooden house and they weren't there long, before strange things started to happen. All night long there would be strange noises, like doors opening and closing, the sound of breaking china, and in the morning, when they came down, they would find the cupboard doors open and the dishes smashed on the floor and all the pictures were turned on their hooks on the walls.

Word of this spread throughout the community and people stopped coming to visit. That was a hard thing in those days, when that's what people did of an evening; people would share stories and conversation in your home. And to be a newly-wed couple in a strange community and to not have people come to visit, that was a hard thing indeed.

So young Mister Curran talked to some of the older people in the community and he found that not being from there and not knowing the stories of that place, he had built his house on a path that was used by the little people, the fairies, to march from one side of the meadow to the other. It was they who were coming in the middle of the night and showing their displeasure.

Curran knew what had to be done. He got together about 20 or 30 men—fishermen and sailors all—and they set to work with muscle and sweat and rope and tackle and they hauled the house from one end of the meadow all the way over to the other side and they set it up once more, and they were never bothered by the fairies again.

[a traditional tale, as told by the late Mr. Ray Curran, to Dale Jarvis]

As one local writer puts it, “Newfoundlanders love telling fantastic tales, but most of them are unknown outside the regular places of narration: the local barber shop, the fishing boat, the outdoor lunching ground, the bunkhouse, the moose hunting camp, the rabbit-catching canvas tent, the partridgeberry barren, the baneapple bog, the blueberry grounds, the troutng pool”¹. Halpert and Widdowson include sealing voyages and wakes as other traditional storytelling venues: “a man who knew a long story that would pass the time was a welcome addition to any group”².

In her study of winter games and storytelling traditions on Fogo Island, Gwen Primmer notes specifically that this type of informal storytelling is part of the process of transmitting both historical information and traditional knowledge. She writes that the listeners, entirely men in her specific study, “learn a great amount about the community and the happenings that occur by listening to the stories recited. Men obtain information regarding the past, and this information aids in making comparisons between various things (for example the weather, fishing season, the time the caplin came in and so on)”³.

Much of this traditional knowledge and local folklore was, and continues to be, shared within communities at a very informal level, passed on by word of mouth. It carries with it a great deal of practical information, as well as more abstract concepts of history, heritage and identity.

Informal, interpersonal, anecdotal storytelling is central to the oral nature of much of Newfoundland and Labrador’s traditional folklife and folklore. It is, as George

1. Stanley Sparkes, *Bragg's Island Sweetheart and Other Folklore Fantasies*, St. John's, Jesperson P, 1988, p. ix.

2. Herbert Halpert and JDA Widdowson, *Folktales of Newfoundland: The Resilience of the Oral Tradition*, Volume I, St. John's, Breakwater, 1996, p. xxxiv.

3. Gwen Primmer, “Winter Games and Storytelling of the Inshore Fishery, Fogo Island”, *Culture and Tradition* 7, 1983, p. 34.

Story argues, “not merely a survival but a vigorous and integral part of the life of the communities”⁴. It is important to stress, in a Newfoundland context, the importance of the link between storytelling and the transmission of traditional knowledge and oral history.

“It’s only now that I’m older I fully realize how important storytelling is to our heritage,” writes Fitzpatrick-McFarlane, “for it helps us define who we are as individuals⁵.”

The story of the house on the fairy path is one of these defining stories. It is more than just a quaint tale of folk belief, it is a story about the importance of community knowledge, a story about the transmission of information, and a story about how shared information defines who is included as part of the community and who is not.

Mr. Curran’s story is special then, as it is both an example of, and a commentary on, intangible cultural heritage.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) or what some call “Living Heritage” encompasses many traditions, practices and customs. These include the stories we tell, the family events we celebrate, our community gatherings, the languages we speak, the songs we sing, knowledge of our natural spaces, our healing traditions, the foods we eat, our holidays, beliefs and cultural practices.

ICH takes many forms in Newfoundland and Labrador: “Specific examples of our intangible traditions include—among many other customs, skills and practices—the Christmas mummering traditions, and boat building skills. Our ICH can also include Aboriginal languages and cultural knowledge, our various regional dialects, and the expressive culture, values and beliefs of the diverse cultural groups of Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of us play music or tell stories; some of us know about fishing grounds or berry picking spots; others know about curing illnesses; some of us play cards or skateboard”⁶.

Newfoundland and Labrador’s ICH Strategy

In 2002, Dr. Gerald Pocius of Memorial University of Newfoundland’s Department of Folklore represented Canada at a meeting of experts in Rio de Janeiro working on an early draft of UNESCO’s Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Twenty specialists from around the world debated a number of key issues that the Convention hoped to address.

4. George Story, *People of the Landwash: Essays on Newfoundland and Labrador*, Eds Melvin Baker et al. St. John’s, Harry Cuff Publications, 1997, p. 108.

5. Lucy Fitzpatrick-McFarlane, “Tell Me a Story”, *Downhome* 18.4, 2005, p. 117.

6. *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?*, St. John’s, Intangible Cultural Heritage Program, Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2008, p. 1.

Pocius writes, “I returned to Newfoundland that January inspired and enthusiastic, convinced that UNESCO’s work in this field was of immense importance to our province and our culture. I was optimistic that the Government of Canada would support UNESCO’s work, and soon I became involved in ICH policy discussions in Ottawa, working with the Department of Canadian Heritage. I was naturally disappointed when the Canadian government decided not to sign on to the final version of the Convention that was [adopted] in 2003. However, a number of us had begun work here in our province on ICH, believing that we could pursue many of the UNESCO policies here even though our federal government was not a signatory of the Convention”⁷.

In 2006, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador released its Provincial Cultural Strategy, *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador*. In it, the government outlined the need for a strategy to safeguard Intangible Cultural Heritage, and recommended to “over the longer term, create a public advisory committee with responsibility for the recognition and designation of provincial intangible cultural heritage”⁸.

To that end the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation appointed a Working Group to develop a draft strategy and to consult with stakeholders in the Province. In undertaking this task, the ICH Working Group drew extensively on the results of discussions and recommendations that came out of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Forum, held in St. John’s in June of 2006, hosted by the Association of Heritage Industries (AHI). Among the participants were representatives from heritage organizations around the province, as well as many interested individuals.

The overall vision of Newfoundland and Labrador’s ICH Strategy is to ensure that Intangible Cultural Heritage is safeguarded as both a living heritage and as a source of contemporary creativity. The strategy has four goals: documentation, that work of inventorying; celebration, where we honour our tradition-bearers; transmission, where we ensure that skills are passed from person to person, generation to generation and community to community, and cultural industry, where we can build sustainable communities, using Intangible Cultural Heritage as a tool.

While the ideal ICH activities are those that include a component of each of the four goals (documentation, celebration, transmission, and cultural industry), this article will focus primarily on the issue of celebration.

7. Gerald Pocius, “A Review of ICH in Newfoundland & Labrador”, *Intangible Cultural Heritage Update* 16, May 2010, p. 1.

8. *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador: The Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture*, St. John’s, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006, p. 35.

We are pretty good at celebrating stuff in Newfoundland; we love to have a party. But celebration also means honouring the contributions of tradition bearers, and acknowledging the importance of living traditions.

When the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) does work with ICH, we try to involve tradition-bearers as much as possible. At events, meetings, and workshops, we bring in people who have traditional knowledge and traditional skills. Even when the meeting may be more about policy development, it is important to have tradition bearers involved in some way. We try to engage tradition-bearers in those processes and have meetings where they are part of the discussion and that they can come and talk about what is important to them. So you are just as likely to meet someone like a traditional boat builder, at one of our meetings as you are a politician or a policy-maker.

Celebrating ICH in Newfoundland and Labrador also involves finding creative ways to get tradition bearers out into the community and start sharing their stories, to raise the understanding of ICH value in the community.

One example of this approach is an event called “Tea With Hookers” which was organized by the ICH office in coordination with folklorist Sandra Wheeler on the west coast of Newfoundland.

The event involved three rug hookers—three women who were involved in the tradition of rug hooking and mat making—in different ways: Florence Crocker was an older woman who grew up with the tradition; Molly White, who runs a little business based around rug hooking; and Rose Dewhurst, who is a contemporary artist, a modern visual artist who has started to use rug hooking as a way of expressing herself.

HFNL hosted an on-stage conversation with these three rug hookers. The interview was recorded, and will be part of a radio documentary that's being developed. Fifty other rug hookers came to listen and participate. They all brought their rugs and they all shared and talked about the tradition of rug-hooking.

A slightly larger event which celebrates living traditions in the province is our annual Mummers Festival. One of the key needs identified in the ICH Strategy was to create a folk-life festival for Newfoundland. There are a large number of folk festivals in Newfoundland and in Labrador that celebrate music and dance. The goal of the folklife festival is to celebrate other aspects of traditional life.

Mumming is a Christmas tradition, similar to the Acadian tradition of Mi-carême. It is a disguise tradition, where people will dress up in costume, where the natural order of the world is reversed—men dress as women, women dress as men. It's also based on revelation; you go from house to house in disguise and then there's a guessing game and you guess who the person is.

Mummering is complex in the province. It happens differently—very, very differently—in different place. As rural communities grow smaller, as we're faced with out-migration and ageing populations, this tradition doesn't happen in quite the same way that it used to. We wanted to bring that tradition back; we wanted to introduce it to new generations of people, we wanted to make it increasingly more relevant to young people. We wanted to ensure that this tradition would continue.

Mummering takes a lot of different forms. One of the forms that we were interested in bringing back as part of the Mummering tradition, is the hobby horse tradition.

Mummering has been in Newfoundland for a long time. We know that there were hobby as early Sir Humphrey Gilbert's voyage to Newfoundland in 1583.

A hobby horse is essentially a horse head on a stick, with a person inside it, hidden under a cloak or blanket. This was part of the disguise tradition. Festival organizers researches examples of these types of artefacts, which are fairly rare in museum collections.

Based on museum pieces, HFNL created workshops to recreate this tradition and to teach people in the ways of doing it. The workshops recreated the tradition of building hobby horses which were then used as part of our Mummers Parade and Mummers Festival—part of the cultural revitalization that's happening in the province.

Culture sings. It needs to sing. It sings and it dances and it jumps and it changes and we as connectors, as animateurs, we need to be able to sing and dance and jump and change with the tradition as the tradition unfolds.

After the success of the Mummers Festival, HFNL started another festival, called the Festival On Fire; our second folk life festival. Staff looked at another tradition that was dwindling, to which we wanted to give the spark of life—the November 5th bonfire night celebrations. This was historically a very popular tradition in out-port Newfoundland.

HFNL partnered with local fire departments to make sure that community bonfires were being done safely, with town council approval. The original objective was to have five large bonfires. In the end, 42 communities came together to build bonfires all across the province, some of them small, some of them quite large indeed.

Bonfire Night is an Anglo-Newfoundland Protestant tradition largely, but it does happen in Roman Catholic communities as well. In 2010, the festival on November 5th coincided with Diwali, so HFNL partnered with the Hindu community to have their Festival of Light celebrations at Signal Hill National Historic Site to happen at the same time.

In addition to the bonfires and public celebrations, HFNL hosted an event where traditional bearers talked about the tradition of bonfires in Newfoundland, and about the Iranian tradition of bonfires, providing another multicultural element to the festival.

Project-Based Training

One of the techniques that HFNL uses to revitalize ICH is what we are calling “project-based training.” One example is given below. Over the past few years, HFNL has been involved with a series of project on the Baccalieu Trail, about an hour’s drive from St. John’s.

In 2010, HFNL sponsored an open community meeting with different stakeholders: town council members, historical society member, and interested people in the community. HFNL brought them together and asked, “What matters to you? What are you worried about losing in your community?”

Participants were led through a process of facilitation where they were introduced to the categories of ICH, as defined by UNESCO. Participants then wrote down all the things they could think of in their neighbourhoods and in their communities in the region.

There is a point in this process which is always tremendously exciting, because at that point, many communities have never critically identified what sort of projects they want to work on.

In the Baccalieu Trail session, participants looked at the long list of items of ICH they had identified. They then selected the top five or six things that they thought were most under threat in their communities. They did this utilizing a voting system where participants checked off the things that they thought to be interesting or at threat, or things that needed to be worked on.

This particular group of communities decided that the tradition that was most under threat, for them, was the tradition of old-time community concerts. These were non-professional concerts that were done in town parish halls. Concerts would involve traditional music, recitation, stories, humorous skits, or little plays, with a little bit of dance, a little bit of food.

Participants expressed concern that performance in the province was becoming increasingly professionalized, and that they wanted to celebrate local art at a local level.

At the same time, participants were asked what type of training they were interested in. Training in cultural documentation and oral history collection was identified as a need, so HFNL developed training workshops on oral history techniques.

Participants were taught how to use equipment, how to develop questionnaires, how to develop questions, how to develop consent forms, and how to contribute to the inventory of ICH.

When participants were taught how to do interviews, and how to use equipment, a local tradition-bearer, who's been involved in the organization of traditional concerts, was brought in to be interviewed as part of the workshop. That sample interview was recorded by participants, and then included as part of the province's online inventory of ICH.

After that workshop, HFNL staff conducted more interviews with tradition-bearers in the region. Every month we profile a different tradition-bearer as part of our newsletter, so one of the tradition-bearers who works a lot with recitation and community concerts, was the featured tradition bearer for that month.

More community meetings were held to determine where we would hold events, how much we would charge, and who would perform. The HFNL office packaged all these community events together as a festival which was held April 28th to the 30th, May 6th to May 25th, 2011. HFNL provided publicity, printed posters, and created a website for the event.

The results of the training project included: five community concerts in three communities; increased attention to non-professional performers and tradition-bearers; community members who are trained in oral history collection and cultural documentation; a revitalization of the concert tradition, carried out by the community for the community, not for tourists.

The full process was documented, added to the ICH inventory, and made accessible to the public on the web. Importantly, all the money that was raised at these community concerts went back into the community, directed back into local heritage and ICH projects.

Conclusion

ICH work in Newfoundland and Labrador is still in its infancy, in some regards, but we are making great strides forward. A survey of community museums and heritage society revealed that a very high percentage of those interviewed are familiar with the concept of intangible cultural heritage, and we see a growing awareness of ICH issues at all levels of government in the province.

As Gerald Pocius puts it, "We continue to learn from other countries, as we endeavour to put our ICH policy into practice. With limited means, we continue to engage in activities that encourage the sustainability of the province's living traditions"⁹.

9. Pocius, *op. cit.*, p. 2.



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